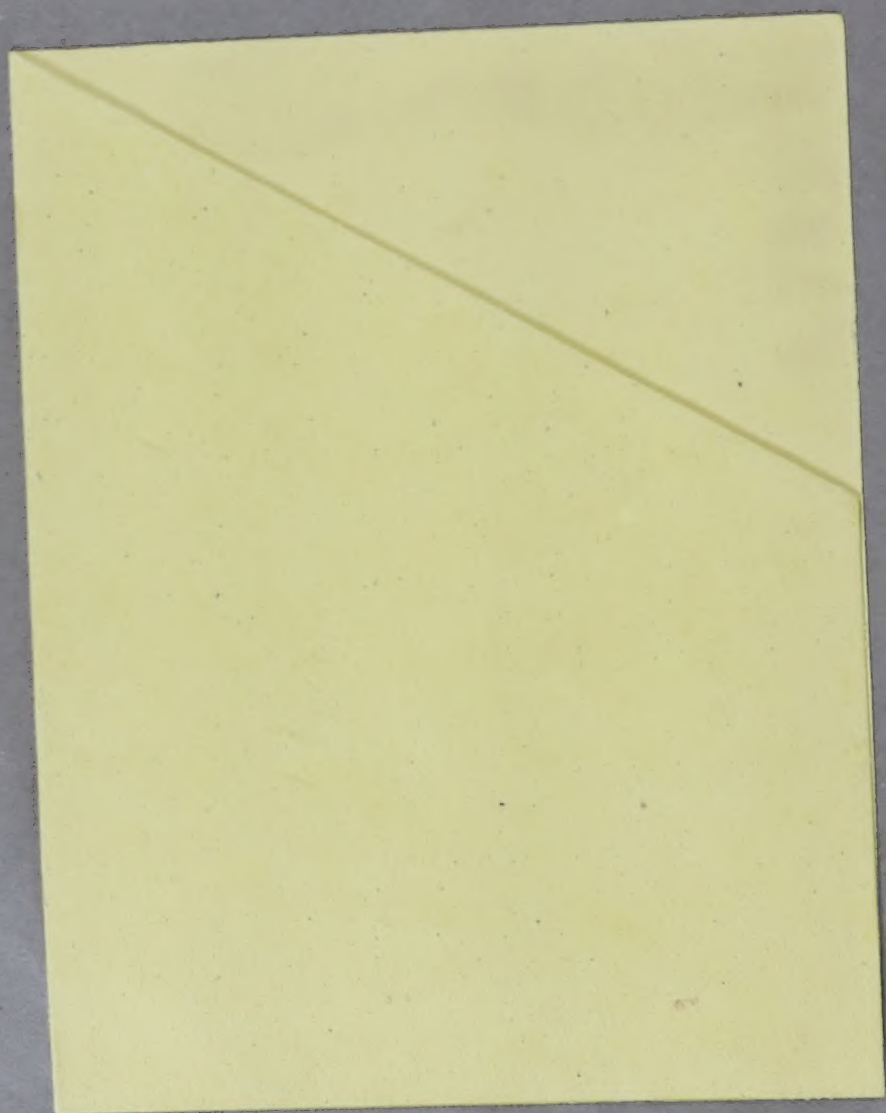


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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

Mark's Road, Bangalore

8/50

NOTES ON PRAYER

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AN AICUF PUBLICATION 1977

PRAYER MADE MEANINGFUL

Those who work with youth are aware that our young men and women are not averse or apathetic to prayer but they are in search for more meaningful group and personal prayer. In a changing society where interpersonal relationships are often strained they would like to discover themselves and others in view of more genuine relationship and above all realise that a deep relationship through communication and communion with the Inner Reality, the Ultimate, God, is a must to inner peace, external commitment to society and fulfilment in life. Fr. Anthony de Mello, director of 'Sadhana', De Nobili College, Pune, has systematically gathered and worked out exercises & methods of self-awareness and self-understanding so that individuals may integrate themselves, discover the unity of their being (Awareness) perceive the various facets of life from a variety of perspectives (Fantasy Exercises) and enter through prayer (Devotional Prayers) into communion with Him who lives within the 'inner cave' of every human heart. It is an effort at initiating those in search of deeper meaning, peace and harmony through concrete exercises of experience, reflection and prayer. It is a happy synthesis of classical Christian prayer, enriched by elements traditional in the East and in modern psychology.

I have been using these exercises with students and with those committed to social change and have found them useful. I hope that our 270 AICUF Advisers and many genuine students who wish to deepen their lives will find them helpful.

- Claude D'Souza s.j.

SECTION ONE: THE BODY AND THE SENSES: AWARENESS (1-12)

Exercise 1: Body sensations

Feel touch of clothes on shoulder. Back pressing against chair. Hands. Thigh against chair. Soles of feet touching shoes. Sitting posture.

Feel these sensations. Don't think them.

Keep moving from one sensation to another. Either the areas of the body indicated above or any others,

Notes: Get in touch with your self to get in touch with God. Come home to yourself. Main obstacle to prayer is nervous tension. This exercise brings relaxation. Great help to keep back erect. Eyes: either shut or half-closed, centred on a spot about three feet away.

Exercise 2: Breathing

Awareness of air passing through *nostrils*. *Feel* touch of air. Quality of sensation. Warmth or coldness of air. Areas of nostrils where touch is felt. Larger quantity of air passing through one nostril rather than the other.

Notes: Method for dealing with distractions: be *aware* of thoughts or images as soon as they arise. Or be aware of *act* of thinking. Difference between watching passers-by through window and following them on street like dog.

Exercise 3: Body sensations: Stillness

After some practice in Exercise 1, experience body as whole. Feel stillness and silence of whole body. Rest in it.

If practised in a group: feel stillness of whole room.

Notes: Be perfectly motionless. When urge to move arises or

other sensations (itching, pricking, etc.) just be aware of them till they disappear.

Do the same with physical pain experienced in keeping still. Practice Exercise 1 during day when walking about; feel movement of legs, arms, etc.

Exercise 4: Breathing God

Return to Exercise 2. Reflection: the atmosphere charged with presence of God. Breathe God in and out.

Be aware of your feeling as you breath God in and out: peace, joy praise. adoration.....

Exercise 5: Breathing God: Non-verbal communication

Repeat Exercise 4. Express desire for God. Hunger for God through your way of breathing in. Express surrender (emphasize breathing out). Love and closeness. Adoration. Thanksgiving. Praise. Humility.

Exercise 6: Body sensations touch of God

Repeat Exercise 1. Make reflection: every sensation created by God's almighty power. Feel touch of God in every part of body: rough, smooth pleasurable, painful ...

Exercise :7 Sounds

Block ears with thumbs. Cover eyes with palms of hands. Listen to sound of your breathing. After ten breaths bring hands to rest on lap, keep eyes closed, listen to every sound in vicinity. The softest. The most distant.

Notes: There is silence in heart of every sound. Sounds are distracting when you attempt to get rid of them or to run away from them. Be aware of them. Every sound contains dozens of sounds within it. Attempt to pick them all up.

Exercise 8: Hearing God

Repeat Exercise 7. Make reflection: every sound is produced and sustained by God's almighty power. God is "sounding". Rest in world of sounds. Rest in God.

Exercise 9: Elementary "contemplatio ad amorem"

Return to world of senses: breathing sounds,. "Sense" God in air you breathe, sounds you hear, sensations you feel. Rest in this world of the senses. Rest in God. Surrender to it, to Him.

Exercise 10: Concentration

Choose body sensation of breathing or sounds for basic object of attention. If focus of attention shifts, be aware of shift. "Now I am thinking." "Now I am irritated." "Now I am listening." Then gently move focus back to basic object of attention.

Sharpen awareness: pick up the lightest sensations, sounds, touches of air passing through nostrils.

Take only one small area of body: be aware of every sensation there.

Breathing: concentrate on inhalation alone or exhalation alone if much bothered by distractions.

Exercise 11: Praying with body

Express various sentiments, attitudes, through body. Move very gently, like petals of flower opening.

Example: Offering and surrender: Raise eyes to heaven. Stop for moment. Raise arms upwards. Turn palms upwards. Bring them together. Stop for moment. Experience what your body is saying.

Love for creation of longing for God: Eyes fixed on horizon. Arms lifted and stretched out in welcome.

Dejection. Praise. Jubilation. Contentment. Adoration....

Exercise 12: Silence

Practise any exercise from 1 to 10. When you experience silence, void, "emptiness", rest in it.

Notes: Intuitional prayer.

"Part A and part B". What is mysticism? Ligature. Part A bound so that Part B will open up to direct intuition of Being.

SECTION TWO: FANTASY (13—28)

Exercise 13: There and Here

Withdraw in fantasy to any place where you have been happy. Take in every detail: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Notice what you *feel*. Return to here and now situation. What do you feel? Notice contrast. Shuttle to and fro between the two places.

Notes: Places in your memory, in your heart, to which you can always retire when you need to feel peaceful and refreshed. This "withdrawal" brings strength to face present situation and also sharpens awareness of present situation.

Exercise 14: A Place for Prayer

Withdraw in fantasy to any place that is likely to foster prayer: seashore, mountain top, river bank, silent church, terrace giving on to starry sky.... Hear sounds (waves, wind in trees, insects at night....) Make your prayer in this context.

Notes: Ignatius says not "composition of place" but "compose yourself, seeing the place."

Everyone can develop this faculty with some practice.

Exercise 15: Peak Experience

Withdraw in fantasy to any place where you had intense experience of God. See place as vividly as possible. Re-capture, atmosphere. Re-live experience. Return to here and now. Withdraw again. Return—and so forth.

Notes: Many peak experiences in life would be very nourishing if we gave time to reliving them in more leisurely fashion. In times of crisis follow advice of Risen Lord to dejected apostles: "Return to Galilee." Return to Joyful days spent with the Lord.

Exercise 16: Contemplation of Joyful Mysteries

In *your* life, not life of Christ. Re-live any joy-giving event of past. Till you feel again same experience. Don't watch scene from outside. Participate in it once more. Seek and find presence of Lord in it. In what form was He present?

Notes: Good way of learning to find God in all events of future.

Exercise 17: Contemplation of Sorrowful Mysteries

Also of *your* life. Return *only* if wound still rankling: resentment, bitterness, grief, remorse, sense of loss. Re-live event. Seek and find presence of Lord in it. Or, *imagine* Lord participating in it as retreatant participates in scenes of Lord's life in Ignatian contemplation.

Notes: Bitterness towards others. Vital to prayer life to drain this out. Psychological helps....

Bitterness towards Lord: don't fear to *feel* it, to *give vent* to it in His presence. Clears atmosphere brings deeper union.

Further exercise for resentments. Stand before Christ Crucified in shame. Ask to participate in His sufferings.

Ideally repeat contemplation till possible to return to events without negative feeling even with feeling of gratitude and joy.

Exercise 18 Imaginative Faith

Imagine Lord sitting close by on empty chair. Speak in low voice. *E.g.* narrate events of past day.

Notes: Thought—speaking to self. Prayer—speaking to Lord. Method recommended by St. Teresa for practice throughout day: "keep Christ by your side". Quickest means for experiencing presence of Christ in your life.

Help in spiritual direction: What kind of Christ is your Christ.

Exercise 19: Ignatian Contemplation

John 5. Pool at Bethesda.

Notes: Truth not of History but of Mystery. Francis of Assisi takes Christ down from Cross. Anthony of Padua holds Infant in arms. Teresa of Avila wipes sweat off His brow at Gethsemani.

Exercise 20 : Symbolical Fantasy

Tree-stump. Mountain Cabin. Mountain Stream. Identify with each. Dialogue. Introduce Christ into scene. Dialogue. Statue in Museum. Dialogue with Christ.

Exercise 21: Healing of Memories

Variation of Exercise 17. Return to unpleasant event of recent past. Re-live experience. Then place self before Christ Crucified. No words. Non-verbal communication only. Commute between unpleasant event and scene of Christ Crucified.

Exercise 22: Value of Life

Interview with doctor: you have just two months more of

life. Whom do you speak with? Where do you go? What do you plan to do? At night, before Christ in chapel. Compose letter to Provincial/friend.

Notes: Best things of life are free. Only appreciated when about to lose them. Variations of this exercise for appreciating other beautiful things in life: Imagine you are blind. Or in solitary confinement....Sight. Health. Freedom. Friendship. Or even trifles like running water, electric lights, bedsheets....

Exercise 23: Buddhist "Reality" Meditation

Corpses in various stages of decomposition. First others, then yours. 1. Soon after death: cold and rigid. 2. Turning blue. 3. Cracks in flesh. 4. Decomposition in some parts. 5. Decomposition in whole body. 6. Skeleton with some flesh still adhering. 7. Skeleton alone. 8. Heap of bones. 9. Dust.

Notes: Purpose: Peace and joy!! Live in depth!

Exercise 24: Buddhist "Examination of Conscience"

Review "film" of day, starting from this moving backwards. Do not approve or condemn. Observe. If distracted, trace distraction back to source.

Exercise 25: Consciousness of Past

Repeat previous exercise. Dwell on one event, one scene alone. Every gesture, word, look, reaction says something about YOU. Do not analyse. Only LOOK

Next step. Christ was there. Can you see Him? Find Him.

Exercise 26: Awareness of Future

Same as exercise 24, only this time begin from this moment and review "film" of possible future events. Events likely to

happen today - or tomorrow. Look. Observe yourself.

See the same events as you would like them to be. Yourself as you would like yourself to be in them.

Find Christ and His action in each one of these future events. No resolutions ! Just observe.

Exercise 27: Awareness of Persons

Repeat Exercise 24 and/or 26. This time be aware of each person you meet. See Christ in him, Christ who comes to us unrecognized as at Emmaus, Lake Tiberias, yet in human form. Recognize Christ. Love, serve, adore Him.

Exercise 28: Other Variations

Return to event of past, no matter how trifling. Put Christ into it as in a "contemplation". Notice what happens.

Return to event that has caused you pain. Make act of faith : God has willed and controlled it, even if you are to blame (as He willed and controlled Passion of Christ). If you love Him He will draw *greater* good out of it (oh felix culpa ! oh necessarium Adae peccatum !) Ask God to reveal to you the good He plans to draw out of event, or has already drawn from event. Praise Him : hymn, "gloria Patri", your own words.

Do same for some unpleasant event likely to occur in future. Thank Him that it is there. Thank Him for outcome in advance.

SECTION THREE: DEVOTIONAL PRAYER (29 - 42)

Exercise 29: Benedictine Method

Lectio. Meditation—with mouth, not mind. Oratio. (Contemplatio).

Notes : In group prayer, after period of quietening mind through awareness exercise, leader recites or chants sentence

from Scripture. Long pause. Another sentence.

Exercise 30: Chanting

At beginning of personal or group contemplation. Rescant words, to intensify silence: OM or KYRIE ELEISON. Rectotone. In group contemplation, interrupt silence periodically with very brief chanting, to intensify silence. Mearing of words not important and need not be attended to !

Exercise 31: John Climacus .

Recite vocal prayer with perfect attention to (a) words (b) person to whom words are addressed.

Exercise 32: Jesus Prayer

Call upon Spirit without whose aid impossible to pronounce name of Jesus fruitfully. Imagine Jesus before you (what form? Infant, Crucified, Risen Lord?) or within heart or enshrined in centre of forehead.

Pronounce Name each time you breathe out. Notice what you feel.

Pronounce Name with different attitudes or sentiments: adoration, love, trust, surrender, desire, repentance

Hear Him pronounce your name. What is His attitude when He pronounces it? What do you feel?

Exercise 33: The Thousand Names of God

Repeat previous exercise. Then invent new names for Jesus each time you breathe out. Cfr. creativity of psalmist: My Rock, my Shield, my Song... So, "Jesus, my Life. Jesus, my Strength...."

Imagine Christ inventing names for you.

Imagine Him invent for you some of the same names you invented for Him.

Exercise 34: Notice Him Looking

Method recommended by St. Teresa: "mira que te mira." See Him looking at you, lovingly, humbly. Allow yourself to be loved.

Exercise 35: The Heart of Christ

Method of Protestant Pastor for mediating encounter with Christ. 1. Christ the Risen Lord is present here. 2. Christ loves and accepts you just as you are—unconditional love. 3. Speak to Christ.

Exercise 36: The Name as Presence

Only purpose of Name: to mediate Presence. Pronounce name slowly. Feel Presence of Jesus grow on you. In what form? Imaginative? Light? Devotion and unction? Darkness and dryness?

When Presence is vivid, rest in Presence. Have recourse to Name again when Presence dims.

Exercise 37: Intercession

Get in touch with Christ. Imagine yourself flooded with His life and light and power. Lay hands, in imagination, on each person you love. Dwell on each individual. Call down Christ's love on him wordlessly. See him light up with Christ's life and love. See him transformed.

When feel tired, return to strengthening presence of Christ and rest for awhile. When "recharged", return to laying on of hands.

Do same for each person committed to your care. For each person you are obliged to pray for. For your "enemies", those

you dislike, those who dislike you. Feel Christ's power through your hands to each of them.

Pray for whole nations, for Church....

Leave mind blank for a while and allow Spirit to suggest persons and intentions to pray for. Lavish Christ's treasures on others. They are infinite. The more you pour them out on others, the more they will grow in your own heart.

Notes: Importance of intercession: Ignatius in Part X of Constitutions. Francis Xavier. Cure d'Ars. Practice of St. Paul. Teilhard's "vision" of praying nun. Jesus' own practice and recommendation. Heaviness and joy that comes from intercession. Only "work" of Christ today: Rom. 8. Hebr. 7

Exercise 38: The Name as Salvation

Name brings Presence—but *saving* Presence. Jesus means Saviour. "No other name by which we are saved" (Acts 4: 12).

Notes: Salvation: forgiveness of sin; healing for whole man. Name pronounced once with love brings forgiveness of all sin—story of holy man angry with disciple for asking murderous king to recite name of God three times!

Name as healing medicine for whole man: Mahatma Gandhi: rid of all fears, cured of all sickness only through Name of God. "Medicine of the poor".....

Recite name gently, desiring to be filled with Presence of Jesus. Now "anoint" each of senses and faculties with the Name. "Your name is ointment poured out" (Song of Songs 13). Eyes, ears, lips, tongue, hands, feet....Memory, understanding, will, imagination, heart....See each sense, limb, faculty flooded with Presence and Power of Jesus.

Pour this unction on each of persons you wish to pray for.... on the sick. See each of them light up with Power of Jesus.... Do this for houses, for communities....

Exercise 39: Prayer of Holy Desires

Notes: St. Ignatius to scholastics and Rectors....His own practice at Loyola "holy day-dreaming"! St. Dominic, St. Francis

did this, I shall do more. St. Teresa: "Procurese a los principios andar con alegría y libertad.... tener confianza.... animarse a grandes cosas.... quiere Su Majestad animas animosas". (Vida 13: 1-3).

Psychologically: you cannot attain what you cannot even "see".

Desires for others.... See them transformed. Need not make explicit prayer Just expose God to your desires. Individuals. Community. Province. Society. Church. World.

Desires for yourself. See great exploits of Xavier, Claver, martyrs.... Make them your own through desiring, willing them. Identify with them through your desires.

Desires for today. See yourself being and acting today as you would desire to act and be....

Exercise 40: Fostering God-Centredness

Make list of as many Desires as possible.

Make list of as many Problems as possible.

Be honest: Where does God and search for God fit in your lists?

Take ONE desire and/or problem at a time. Ask yourself: How do I attempt to fulfill this desire? How do I attempt to solve this problem? Live out whole scene in imagination.... Watch your means for solving problems fulfilling desires.

Expose every one of these *means* to God and to His Influence.

What is important here is *exposure*, not *results*.

See every action, thought, etc. coming from God and moving towards God.

Notice how you feel.

Exercise 41: Living Flame of Love

Notes: Exercise based on Cloud of Unknowing's "blind stirring of love", John of the Cross's "living flame of love" moving towards God.

Quieten self through one of awareness exercises. Enter self in imagination. Darkness and void within. Move to centre of being. Imagine you see there tiny flame of love darting upwards towards God or living spring spurting upwards, or blind stirring of love. Put word or short phrase to rhythm of that impulse: My God and my all. Or, Jesus. Or, Abba, Pater. Or, Heart, Fire, God, Love.

Listen to word. Hear it grow, resound in different parts of your being: head, heart....till your whole self resounds with it. Then whole room, house, universe. A cry originating in depths of your being and moving out in ripples throughout world.

Exercise 42: The Name of Jesus in Creation

Note: If children kept silent, the very stones would cry out (Lk. 19: 49). Christians hear this Name in whole of creation, for whole world created in Christ and for Christ.

Listen (in imagination) to waves of sea, sound of river, breeze in trees. "music" of stars moving in firmament, silence of night. Hear name of Jesus.

Listen to technical sounds: engines, machines, cars....Hear name Jesus.

Listen to music, instrumental, choral. Hear name of Jesus.

Listen to name of Jesus resounding in your heart.

See whole of creation crying out for Him, moving towards Him. The Spirit and the Bride: Come!

"I have come to thee to take thy touch before and begin my day"

- Tagore

"This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord, strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart"

- Tagore

"Ask, and you will receive ; seek, and you will find ; knock, and the door will be opened to you."

- Luke 11,9

"Whoever obeys God's commands lives in God and God lives in him. And this is how we know that God lives in us: we know It because of the Spirit he has given us"

- John 3,4

